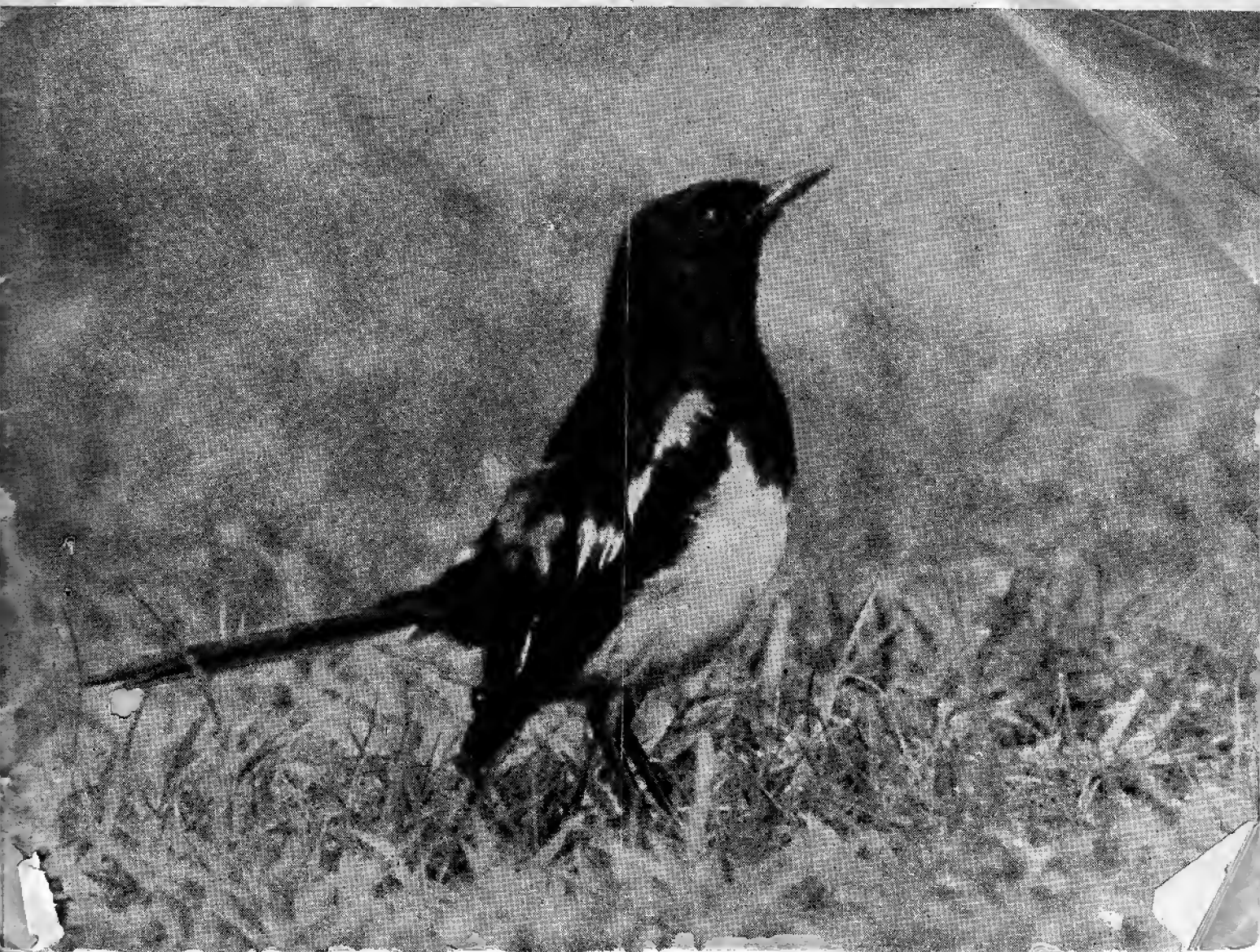


Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

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A Quick Visit to West Africa by Aamir Ali

Going to a new region is always good fun. Even the commonest birds are different and there is the excitement of seeing, and trying to identify, brand new species.

When I knew that I would be going to Yamassoukro, I wasn't very sure where this was, or even quite what it was. It turned out to be a brand new city, planned from scratch, in the centre of the Ivory Coast. It is the home village of the distinguished and long-lasting president of the country, Hophuet-Boigny. It is now being turned into the second city of the country, with wide avenues, magnificent buildings, a presidential palace, a golf club (of course), a boarding school with marble halls and air conditioning, first class hotels, and so on. The city is being carved out of tropical forest and it is sad to see splendid trees being bulldozed to make way for buildings, however elegant.

I asked my son who is in university in England to send me a copy of the Field Guide to the Birds of West Africa by Messrs. Serie, Morel and Hartwig (another example of Anglo-French co-operation). It is in the form which seems now to have become standard and was invaluable.

I had two early morning strolls in the extensive grounds of the Hotel President in Yamassoukro, an afternoon's outing in the surroundings, and the drive back to Abidjan, about 250 km, as opportunities for bird-watching.

It was strange to be in a country where there were no house sparrows or house crows. The common sparrow was the greyheaded (Passer griseus) and the crow was the pied crow (Corvus alba). I had first seen this black and white crow in Ethiopia and wondered at the elegance acquired by this corvus through the simple device of introducing some white into its colour scheme. They were common, perhaps they were all over Africa. One wonders what happens to them in South Africa - the mixture of black and white must surely contravene some racial law.

There were a great many sunbirds in the hotel grounds, mostly on bushes with an attractive pink and white flower. I didn't think sunbirds would be difficult to identify but I changed my mind; they almost achieved the warbler category. I concluded that while most of them were Olive-Bellied, there were some Yellow-Bellied as well. (Nectarinia chloropygia and N. venusta). Could this be? In any case, it was a delight to see the bright metallic blue and green flitting through the branches, or occasionally, flycatcher-like, making sallies after insects on the wing.

A very common bird, both in the gardens and along the roadside, was the Common Garden Bulbul (Pynonotus barbatus). Rather homely and uncolourful, they were very vocal with typical liquid burbling bulbul sounds. Looking at the plate in the Field Guide illustrating some 16 Bulbuls, they seem sadly drab and crestless (crestfallen?) with pale yellow being the only relief from olives and browns. Our Indian Bulbuls score over them on all counts.

One morning, while waiting for breakfast, I was looking at a pair of Bulbuls on a bare-branched tree from my verandah, when by accident, the binoculars focussed on a small- munia sized - bird: brown, black and white. Its back was pale brown, it was white underneath and had a glossy black head and bib. Its sides were streaked. This was one of those rewarding moments when a brand new bird swims into your ken, obligingly perches on a visible bough, and remains long enough for a good hard look. So with the help of the good book I identified this as the Bronze Mannikin (Onchura cucullata). It is an Estrilidine weaver, I learnt, a seed-eating bird, with a nest which is not woven but "usually a domed structure of compacted grass tops". A strange name. Why Brenze? Why Mannikin?

It was probably a flock of these birds that I had seen from a distance in the grounds of the Hotel Ivoire in Abidjan, feeding on the ground. I couldn't see the streaked sides and had not been able to identify them then.

Driving along one of the many unfinished avenues through what was still jungle but wouldn't be for long, I stopped - much to the annoyance of the driver who thought that birdwatching was strictly for the birds - to try and focus on a bird that had crossed the highway. I couldn't see him, but on the top of a very tall tree, there were two reddish birds with very yellow beaks. They looked like large crossbills from below, but when they flew off, there was a bright flash of blue in the wings. Broad-Billed Rollers (Eurystomus glaucurus).

In the hotel grounds, I saw another bird with a very yellow bill and rufous underparts, similar in size but not in shape. It had a flattened head and I felt that it must be a Barbet. By rights it would have been a Yellow-Billed Barbet, but this, it seemed, was green in colour. Could it have been the Bearded Barbet (Lybius dubius)? Dubious, it certainly was.

Walking along a path in the forest between Yamassoukro and Abidjan, we saw two or three particularly interesting birds. There was the Redvented Malimbe (Malimbus scutatus) a striking red and black bird. There was the Senegal Coucal (Centropus senegalensis) a much more attractive bird than the Coucal that we are used to. It had a black head, and pale, almost white, underparts. The back was normal Coucal-coloured.

Perhaps the most fascinating sight was the Black and White-Tailed Hornbill (Lophoceros fasciatus). We saw several, flying slowly from one tall tree to another, attractive in their ungainliness. It has white underparts, with white outside tail feathers, and is black above. The bill is creamish, tipped with black.

As enjoyable as the sighting of new species of birds was the pleasure of my companion on the car trip. He was a vocational training specialist from Argentina and I was worried that he would object to stopping constantly along the roadside. As it turned out, by the end of the trip, he

had become an enthusiastic birdwatcher himself and took genuine delight in each new species we saw. One of the first things he did on returning to Geneva was to buy himself a pair of binoculars and a Field Guide. The ranks of birdwatchers in Geneva have swollen by at least one.

On that drive to Abidjan, we saw several Black Kites. Two days after my return to Geneva, I saw the first one in Geneva to return after its winter absence. I may be wrong, but it looked suspiciously like the one I had seen on the road from Yamassoukro to Abidjan.

Birdwatching in Egypt by S.K. Reeves

I see that in his Note on this subject in the March Issue of the Newsletter, Mr. Sudhir Vyas laments the paucity of books on Egyptian birds.

I am afraid I cannot offer him much comfort, for the books I am about to mention are very difficult to obtain, either by virtue of their rarity or high price. I mention them, however, in order to acquaint him with them in the hope that he may be able to find them in libraries.

The first and most important, because it is authoritatively written, well illustrated and was only published thirteen years ago, is 'The Birds of North Africa from the Canary Islands to the Red Sea' by R.D. Etchecopar and Francois Hue. The illustrations are by that excellent French bird artist Paul Barruel. It was translated from the French into English by P.A.D. Hollom - the editor of the 'Popular Handbook of British Birds' and co-author of 'A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe'. I cannot be sure, but I believe that this book is out of print, however Mr. Vyas neglects it at his peril.

Then, of course, there are the first two volumes (of seven) of that veritable magnum opus, 'Handbook of the Birds of Europe the Middle East and North Africa - The Birds of the Western Palearctic' by Stanley Cramp et al. The first volume was published in 1977 and the second is just to hand. Between them they cover, respectively, Ostriches to Ducks and Hawks to Bustards. This is, technically, a superb work, but at present limited in its coverage because only two volumes have been published to date.

Of older books, there is 'Handbook to the Birds of Egypt' by G.E. Shelley. This was published in 1872, contains 14 hand-coloured plates by Keulemans and gives a descriptive account with notes on habits and distribution and refers to books in which illustrations of the birds are to be found. I am not personally acquainted with the book, but it has been variously described as an important and excellent work.

Another old book which could prove useful in dealing with the commoner birds is, 'Egyptian Birds for the most part seen in the Nile Valley' by Charles Whympers and published in 1909. The book is not intended for the

scientist, but for the layman, who wishes to know something of the birds he sees in Egypt. The fifty-one colour plates by Whympere are truly enchanting bird pictures.

The following books on the birds of neighbouring regions would doubtless prove useful:-

'The Birds of Arabia' by Col. R. Meinertzhagen.

'The Birds of British Somaliland and the Gulf of Aden' by Sir Geoffrey Archer and Eva M. Godman.

'Birds of the Sudan' by Col. F.D. Cave and J.D. Macdonald.

The Eastern Blacknaped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis diffusus*, Sharpe) in Calcutta by Kushal Mookherjee

In the backyard of our house in south Calcutta there are a few large trees. On the rainy afternoon of 13th October, 1977, I saw the bird sitting on the Bael tree. It was at once recognised as the Blacknaped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis*). The golden yellow plumage with black in wings and tail and a broad black eye-band continued behind to meet over the nape, gave the bird a really handsome look. The stout bill was of light pink colour and the legs blackish. The really broad nape-band and the stout bill indicated that the bird was probably an Eastern Blacknaped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis diffusus*, Sharpe) and not the Slenderbilled Blacknaped Oriole (*O.c. tenuirostris*, Blyth). The bird spread its wings and tail and drank the falling rain water. Though I was within 25 feet it showed no discomfort at my presence.

On the 12th October, 1978, I saw the bird again in our backyard. This time it roosted for the night on the Jack-fruit tree. Again on the afternoon of 28th October, 1978, I sighted it, being attracted by its repeated harsh cry, Kree....

Throughout October 1979, I looked for the bird, but failed to find it. Then again on the 15th of March, 1980, the bird came at 4.30 p.m. This time it allowed me to approach within 10 feet to photograph it. I noticed a faint greenish wash on the back. The next day (16th March, 1980) the bird came again sharp at 4.30 p.m. This time though repeatedly chased by the House Crows, it roosted on the Jack-fruit tree.

The evening of 17th March, 1980, was stormy and the Oriole was caught when it fell from the mango tree of a neighbouring house. I measured it and found the following:-

Length - 26 cm. Bill (from feathers) - 31 mm. Wing - 150 mm.
Tail - 95 mm. Tarsus - 24 mm. Nape-band (Width) - 18mm.

The outer webs of the secondaries were broadly yellow and the bill was really stout. The nape-band was much broader than the 12 mm. limit of Slenderbilled Blacknaped Oriole (*O.c. tenuirostris*, Blyth). So the bird must be a Eastern Blacknaped Oriole (*O.c. diffusus*, Sharpe). The bird was released the next morning.

The distribution of Eastern Blacknaped Oriole (O.c. diffusus) in 'Handbook Of The Birds Of India And Pakistan' (1972) by Salim Ali and S.D. Ripley does not include West Bengal. The sighting of the bird at the same spot for two consecutive years (1977 and 1978) at nearly the same date (13th October & 12th October respectively) suggests its migratory nature and all the dates of the sightings (October & March) suggests that it is probably a passage migrant through Calcutta area.

Grey shrike and Black drongo hunting the scorpion and the centipede by
Indra Kumar Sharma

Scorpions and centipedes often take shelter under heaps of bundles of harvested crops in fields. When cultivators remove these for threshing or storing, these get exposed. It was noted that the shrike (Lanius exubitor) and the Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis) take advantage of such occasions for hunting disturbed scorpions, centipedes and insects. First they strike at the head and thorax of scorpions and centipedes to enjure, immobilise and weaken the prey, then overpower and kill the prey with repeated striking at various vital parts of the body, and carry it to a tree. In this way the Grey shrike and the Black drongo are useful birds in control of dangerous scorpions and centipedes besides other harmful pest insects.

Birdwatching in Kashmir by Narendra

When I was posted to Jammu & Kashmir, I had looked forward to an interesting encounter with the bird life of Kashmir. In my two years here, my wish was more than fulfilled. My sojourn started with one year in Poonch-Rajouri areas and now, after a harsh winter in areas 9000' to 13000' high, I made some interesting studies.

The most rewarding encounter was with an albino jungle babbler 6 km. short of Akhnoor from Jammu. It was hopping in the hedges with a group of jungle babblers. It must have been with that group for a long time, probably since* 'object' to its being with them. I observed the albino from as near as 10' to 12' from my jeep for about 15 minutes. My companions were also fascinated by this phenomenon, as they too, like me, had seen an albino babbler for the first time.

Rajouri town, situated at a height of 4500' was possessed of all the common birds we see on the plains. I saw red munia, common and brahminy myna, redvented bulbuls, koels, purple sunbirds, hoopoes etc. As I went up to my place of duty at the height of 6500' and above. I was surprised to find the marked absence of redvented bulbuls. Nowhere above 6000' could I find a single redvented bulbul, but there was an abundance of white cheeked bulbuls. One of our forward defended localities was at a height of 5000' (approx.) There too the redvented bulbuls were not seen, though white cheeked were there. Even in other areas - in the Kashmir Valley, I have not seen redvented bulbuls anywhere. In a

shop in the interior, I was amused to see white cheeked bulbuls hopping on the bags of provisions, pecking at grains much to the consternation of the shop keeper. When he shoed them off, they would perch on snow outside the shop.

Similarly, at heights of more than 6000', I could not see a single rose-ringed parakeet. The blossom headed parakeets were almost everywhere. This fact needs verification by other birdwatchers and if established as true, this could be an interesting finding.

the

In the mountains of the Rajouri sector, I saw pied crested cuckoo, pied and white collared bushchats, the omnipresent jungle crows, swifts, jungle kites and blossomheaded parakeets and the Himalayan scaly bellied woodpecker. In the lower ridges, in the thickly wooded places near the springs, I saw a big colony of white-eyes, blackheaded golden oriole and junglefowl. While on a patrolling, I saw a pair of male and a female grey junglefowl in a courtyard of a local civilian. I was surprised to see them domesticated, moving about with other village hens. On inquiry, I was told that the villagers collect the eggs of wild fowl and have them incubated by their own hens. However, the experience of that civilian was, the junglefowl did not breed in their new environments. But the pair I saw was magnificent, almost double the size of local village fowl. We too bought a few eggs of junglefowl but unfortunately we could not have them incubated properly.

When I went to the valley (Kashmir Valley), there was not much of a change in the bird life. However, I saw grey tits in great numbers. At places above 12000', I saw in the scrub small birds of the size and colour of house sparrow. They were so shy of humans in uniform, they would fly away at the slightest of noises. I could scarcely observe them in detail. At 13000', I saw a magnificent bird of prey. It was rufous coloured, with black streaks, about 1/2" long and about 2 mm wide. In size, it was that of a house crow, but features (head, beak, claws, wings) resembled a kestrel. Would some reader please identify it?

I moved quite a bit in the snow and towns, villages when they were under a thick carpet of snow, during this winter. All hoopoes were absent. Now that the snow has melted, hoopoes are back in circulation.

Where do hoopoes go in winter?

Rufousbacked Shrike in a temper by Dr. Ashok Kumar Sharma

It was late in the evening on 16th January, and I was standing under a Mangifera indica tree, when a Rufousbacked Shrike suddenly came out of a nearby hedge and perched on a dried twig about four feet away. It stared at me for a moment and then started shrieking. What intrigued me was not its shrieking but its subsequent violent attack with its beak on the broken end of the dried branch on which it was sitting. It wasn't satisfied with tearing and breaking off the pieces of that twig but ate a piece of the pith inside. When its rage finally died down, it flew away after staring at me for a few moments.

Red-redirected action

I couldn't explain this unusual behaviour except that it was probably started to find me standing under the tree to which it came to roost for the night. It was later on confirmed that the tree in question was its usual roosting site.

Nesting Season of the Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) by Nalin and Priya Nair

On the morning of 3rd April we went to watch birds at Pashan Lake just outside Poona. Among the many interesting birds we saw was a family party of Purple Moorhens --- two adults and three juveniles. The latter were about two-thirds of their parents' size, with smoky dark plumage and black instead of red beaks. Mr. Thomas Gay, who was with us, guessed they might be about 3 to 4 months old. The Book of Indian Birds gives the nesting season for these birds as "June to September". So the sight of even four-months-old young in April means that the season can extend even up to December.

Movement of Migratory Birds in Kachchh by S.N. Varu

I have maintained notes of the arrival and departure of some Migratory Birds in Kachchh in the year 1977-78. Extract of notes is given as detailed below:-

Sl.No.	Name of Bird	First seen	Last seen
1	2	3	4
1.	Common Sandpiper	22-7-77	25-4-78
2.	Marsh Sandpiper	7-8-77	14-5-78
3.	Terek Sandpiper	27-8-77	22-3-78
4.	Red Shank	"	25-3-78
5.	Green Shank	12-8-77	22-3-78
6.	Little Stint	26-7-77	25-4-78
7.	Common Snipe	20-9-77	22-3-78
8.	Blacktailed Godwit	27-8-77	"
9.	Ruff/Reeve	"	"
10.	Temminck's Stint	13-8-77	14-5-78
11.	White Wagtail	20-9-77	29-3-78
12.	Yellowheaded Wagtail	"	25-3-78
13.	Blackheaded Yellow Wagtail	"	"
14.	Coot	16-9-77	20-2-78
15.	Pintail Duck	10-12-77	25-2-78
16.	Shoveller Duck	"	25-3-78
17.	Hoopoe	31-7-77	16-3-78
18.	Rosy Pastors	"	25-4-78
19.	Pied Chat	13-8-77	25-2-78
20.	Desert Chat	22-11-77	19-2-78
21.	Isabelline Chat	29-10-77	4-2-78
22.	Marsh Harrier	16-9-77	25-3-78
23.	Greynecked Bunting	"	"

Aggressive Behaviour of *Tringa glareola* Spotted Redshank by KSR Krishna Raju

During my studies on the ecological aspects of certain migrant waders at Point Calimere in March 1972, I noted what can be called aggressive behaviour in *Tringa glareola*.

Three *Tringa glareola* were seen feeding together one afternoon and one among them appeared more dominant, aggressive and active. I marked them 'A', 'B', 'C' and the entry reads as follows:

'A' the dominant and 'B' and 'C' the innocents are feeding together. Suddenly 'A' came in between the other two and they gave way to the former, by moving apart. At this stage the peck rates are poor for the 'B' and 'C' and practically nil for 'A', which is restless - as evident from its actions. It again went in between them and this time 'B' moved apart but 'C' did not budge. There is no reason to think that that particular spot offers more food or has any other conceivable charm. However, on seeing the determined 'C', 'A' got apparently annoyed and began chasing it swiftly, giving one or two strong pecks and occasionally jumping above the ground. The chase and jumps with wings rised followed for about a minute or so, to a distance of about 15-20 yards from where 'C' flew off and 'A' resumed slow walk.

Such short chases and avoidances are not uncommon and were observed elsewhere both in *Charadrius dubius* and *Ch. alexandrinus* on the shorelines of great bitter lake and gulf of Suez in Egypt - as was noted by Simmons (1953). Similar behaviour was also recorded by Simmons (53) in the case of *Ch. leschenaulti*.

Such leap-frogging, if we are allowed to borrow the term coined by Nether-sole-Thompson was also recorded previously in the case of *Ch. apricaria* and *Tringa totanus* by the same author, but this perhaps is the first time that 'Leap-frogging' is recorded in *I. glareola*.

References: Simmons, K.E.L. (1953): Some aspects of aggressive behaviour in Plovers' IBIS: 95(115P).

Acknowledgements: I am grateful to Dr. Salim Ali for his guidance during the research work and to Shri. J.C. Daniel for his help.

Bat seizing Bird by Thomas Gay

On the evening of 19 January, I just missed a direct sight of an event that must surely be very rare.

About 6 p.m., hearing some commotion outside our flat, I went out and found my grandchildren and the neighbours' children excitedly discussing something they had just seen. This was a bat, they told me, which they had seen clinging to the top strand of our barbed-wire fence (about 5 feet above the ground) with a small bird in its clutches. A crow had been watching with interest from an overhanging branch, while a cat gazed up with no less interest from the ground below. Unfortunately, the whole group had separated just before I came out of the house.

The bird, I was told, had managed to flutter off and had disappeared. The best description the children could give of it suggested Indian Robin. I was shown where the bat had gone, and there I found it hanging, about six feet up, on a rough stone wall. Its body was about the size of an ordinary House Rat.

Does any reader know of another instance of a bird being seized by a bat?

Correspondence

Social and Sexual Behaviour of Sparrows by V. Santharam

I had written sometime back about the House Sparrow's behaviour (the male attacking the female as she approached his nest) which was observed by Shri. V.J. Rajan. So I would be glad if you could add the following material which I have collected from Tinbergen's "Social Behaviour in Animals" which could be a more likely explanation than the one already quoted from Dr. Burton's book. The following is the portion from Tinbergen:

"Blue herons (as described by Verwey) live solitarily during the winter and return to the breeding colonies in spring. The males arrive first, and take up a position on an old nest of the previous year, or on a place where they are going to build a new nest. Here each of them utters the 'song', a harsh, monosyllabic call, not very pleasant to the human ear, but attractive to the females. When a female arrives, it settles on a branch near the male of her choice. The male begins to court at once, but when the female responds by approaching, he wards her off, and a skirmish or even a furious fight may ensue. When the female flies off, the male at once resumes his frantic calling, and then she may turn and return to him. This again may evoke hostile reactions, but gradually the aggressiveness subsides, the birds begin to tolerate each other, and eventually mate. It is clear that the male, and presumably the female as well, reacted to the partner in two ways: by a sexual response, drawing them together for the purpose of mating, and by an aggressive response, possibly mingled with fear, or the tendency to escape. Gradually the sex drive overcomes the hostile tendencies. This change in the relative strength of the various drives involved may be due in part to a learning process, the birds getting sex drive under the influence of the repeated and prolonged sexual stimulation from the partner. That growth of the sex drive plays a part is indicated by the fact that skirmishes are rare, or short, in pairs that form later in the season. Males that have been waiting for a mate for a fortnight are so strongly motivated sexually by the time a female joins them that they may accept her almost at once."

Relevant extracts from Maurice Burton by V. Santharam

I recently went through an interesting book on Animal Behaviour entitled "Just Like An Animal" by Maurice Burton. On Page 26, 'Chapter-2 Animal

Manners', I came across some interesting observations which will, I hope, throw some light on the two queries that appeared in the 1979 issues of the Newsletter. I am reproducing the relevant parts below, with my own comments.

(a) House Sparrows by V.J. Rajan (January 1979 issue): "Birds have smooth brains and outstandingly their behaviour tends to be ritualized (or stylized).

This comes out in the treatment of the female by the male. Sparrows have been quoted as an example of male birds being non-aggressive towards the females. Yet the general rule is that when a female bird enters the territory of a male, in the normal course of seeking a mate, his first reaction is to attack her as an intruder. It is his way of finding out whether her intentions are honourable. An intruding male when attacked shows fight. An intruding female goes into a submissive attitude thereby demonstrating that she is a female, beyond a shadow of doubt, and one intent on reproduction. When this test has been passed, courtship proceeds with the male showing her the difference due to her sex".

So it would be interesting if Mr. Rajan could write on the reaction of the female on the "vigorous pecking of the male" when she approached the nest or territory of the resident male.

(b) Birdwatching at Atherampalley by R. Sugathan (September, 1979 issue)

"At one end of the lawn a starling was feeding on household scraps. A cock blackbird, the bully of the garden, tried to usurp the food but was driven off by the starling. Later, a newly-fledged song thrush edged towards the starling, which turned aggressively to the thrush and charged as it had at the blackbird. The force of the rush pushed the young thrush on to its tail, whereupon it opened its beak wide. Gaping is the releaser signal of most young birds to which the parents automatically respond by pushing food down their throats. The starling automatically responded too. Its aggression vanished and it fed the thrush. This was genetic altruism, an automatic or instinctive response by an adult bird to the sight of a wide-open beak".

It is therefore interesting to note that Mr. Sugathan also noticed the behaviour of the young cuckoo-shrike as it approached the racket-tailed drongo gaping for food, which as Mr. Burton says acts as a 'releaser signal' of the young birds to which parent birds automatically respond. This sort of 'genetic altruism' seems to be more obvious in the case of the babblers which are more social birds for it is very common to see the young babbler chick being fed by birds other than the parent birds themselves.

Nesting, not feeding by V. Santharam

This is with reference to my article 'Notes from My Bird-Diary'. I had, in the above mentioned article, written on the 'odd feeding habit of white-breasted kingfisher'. In this note, I had written that the reason for the bird's clinging to the wall, near the cavity was for the purpose of feeding. But my recent observations indicate that it was not the main

reason. This morning I noticed a couple of them in the same place (as mentioned in the note). There are two cavities on the wall (which also serves as the wall to the adjoining house). I saw them entering the cavities, which were large enough to accommodate one bird at a time. The bird that entered one cavity was obviously digging as some dust, sand and other particles were seen falling outside. So I guess they were only attempting to nest. My observations of the last year indicating that it could have been a feeding habit doesn't seem to fit, although they could have incidentally come across an insect or some such thing and fed on it.

If the birds are trying to nest, then this is another incident to show that birds are instinctive in behaviour and not intelligent for the nest can never come off as the tunnel would lead to the interior of the house.

Sparrow feeds on young garden lizard by V. Santharam

I was a bit surprised when I read Shri. Lavkumar Khacher's comment in the February 1979 issue of the "Newsletter" where he mentioned that he had seen redvented bulbuls feeding on lizards. But I was even more surprised when I was told by my parents that they had seen a house sparrow attacking a small garden lizard and eventually feeding on it, having battered it on the ground as the mynas did. This incident occurred on the afternoon of 25th March 1979. Though sparrows are omnivorous birds, and known to feed on a variety of items, it is surprising to find them feeding on young lizards.

Frigate Bird by Vivek Kunte

Regarding Mr. Santharam's note, on Friday 29-2-80 at about 5 p.m. I had observed the frigate bird over the bridge on Adyar River near Theosophical Society. Being on a scooter in the traffic I could not observe the bird in detail but the flight profile indicated it was a frigate bird. It was flying from the sea up the river at a height of about 100 feet.

Identification Problem by Vivek Kunte

I had been to Rameshwaram on 23rd February 1980 and saw two birds which I could not identify and I would appreciate any help. My notings were:

1) Kite + white underside and under wings, long white tail, black spot at the base of tail (could be feet), yellowish pink beak shaped like a crow's. Flying profile similar to a parakeet's. Flight - continuous flapping of wings. A pair seen on sunny afternoon at 3.30 p.m. circling above temple gopuram at Rameshwaram on 23.2.80.

2) Myna + white underside and under the tail, thin = 4-5 in long legs, black thin straight beak = 2 in long, dusty brown head neck and breast, back and wings dark brown. Seen on Rameshwaram beach at 6.30 p.m. Clear sky. Single specimen on the beach. Observed walking about on the beach with constant up and down bobbing of stumpy tail and back and forth motion of head at the same time. Occasionally jabbing the beak into the ground to pick up something. Observed for about 15 minutes but no call heard and no attempt at flight in that period. Also was patrolling only about 15 feet long stretch of the beach.

Migrants arriving in U.K. (9.4.80) by Sydney Reeves

We are now eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Summer Migrants. The first few chiff-chaffs, yellow wagtails and Wheatears have come in, and our local colony of Avocets is building up steadily. There are also reports of some Terns having been seen. Of rarities, a Red Kite, a Goshawk and an Osprey have passed through. The Divers and Grebes seem to have left our inshore waters. Other deserters are the Snow Bunting, Lapland Buntings and the Shore Larks.

Golden Orioles by Prakash Garde

With reference to the Miscellaneous Notes by Shri Thomas Gay (December '79 issue) wherein he has mentioned hearing Golden Orioles calling much after their breeding season, i.e. in October-November 1979, I would like to mention that I too have heard Golden Orioles calling in mid-November this year at Nagpur.

I may mention one more incident about this species which, I think, is quite significant. I saw a Golden Oriole (male) hovering over 3-4 feet tall grass in a lake and hawking insects flushed out by the fanning of its wings. It was at the Koradi tank about 15 kms. from Nagpur at 9.30 a.m. on 16.12.1979 in broad day light. The bird was perching in a mango tree on the bank and making sorties approximately every five minutes over a patch of grass about 40 yards inside the water line. It made three such sorties, flew to another bush some 400 yards away, returned to its original place in the mango tree after some time and did one more sortie before flying away. While hovering over the patch of grass, the bird was moving to and fro with wings beating steadily. It would catch some insect in mid-air and return to its perch to finish it off. I and my two friends watched it from a distance of approx. 20 yards from the patch of grass.

Newsletter Problems by Indra Kumar Sharma

It is regretted that only 140 subscribers have renewed subscription for 1980, where you had a target for 500. I and Mr. Liyaqutalla Khan discussed the March issue of NLBW and we had coinciding opinion that NLBW wastefully wasted seven pages on 'Bird Migration in Madras' by Mr. Santharam which interest little. That note could be given in two pages concisely deleting literal language. NLBW should not publish articles more than three pages at the most, concise informative language should be used to give more informations. NLBW should contain more concise informative notes and comments, then NLBW would be popular. Articles on economic ornithology and ecological aspects ornithology should be preferred that will popularise NLBW into forest department, zoological survey and zoological departments of universities. In Jodhpur, Dr. Bhusan Prakash, and Central Arid Zone Research Institute used to subscribe NLBW but they have discontinued it for the last two years. Hoping my suggestion will appeal you having practical creative approach.

(The primary function of the NLBW is to enable and encourage amateur birdwatchers to communicate with each other. A too technical approach might lead to discourage this. Editor)

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Photo by : Vijayakumaran Nair